Mafia Charge

VOTE QUIZ OF

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(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE — The House voted 95-4 today to form a committee of the whole to question the author of a national magazine article linking the Mafia to Louisiana government.

The committee would subpoena within two weeks Life magazine reporter David Chandler and others to question them about the April 10 magazine story containing allegations of Mafia domination in the state.

The measure, which passed the House on a motion by Rep. Luke LeBlanc of Lafayette, now requires Senate approval.

REP. EDWARD LeBreton of New Orleans commented that any legislative actions taken during this session will be criticized because of adverse publicity given to the state.

"If we pass taxes, it will be because the Mafia wanted taxes. If we don't pass taxes, it will be because the Mafia didn't want taxes. We've got to do this so we won't do legislative work under a cloud," LeBreton declared.

Minor opposition to the move centered around interruption of the normal legislative workload.

ADMINISTRATION floor leader Rep. Robert Munson of Cheneyville said privately, "This is what the governor said he wanted."

Earlier today, the Senate postponed until Monday debate on three conflicting resolutions to create a probe committee on the Mafia charges, hoping the weekend recess would bring a compromise.

A Senate committee approved the resolutions, including one backed by the administration calling for an immediate start of the probe.

Probe Launched

LIFE WRITER

The committee voted, 6 to 2, in favor of the administration resolution after hearing a teary plea by C. H. "Sammy" Downs, now head of the Department of Public Works, for a short investigation into the allegations by Life that organized crime wields great influence in state and local government.

The administration resolution calls for immediate creation of an investigative committee to report back to the Legislature before the end of the 60-day session.

IT WAS AMENDED in committee to permit a further investigation if the committee feels it is necessary, following its preliminary report. The size of the proposed committee was increased from five to seven members—three senators and four House members.

Gov. John J. McKeithen, in a joint session address yesterday, urged immediate investigation into the charges.

Opponents of the resolution, which was authored by Sens. Charles C. Barham of Ruston, Adrian G. Duplantier of New Orleans and Joe Lesage of Shreveport, expressed fear that a "quickie" investigation would not be able to do the job they feel is necessary.

THE OTHER two resolutions given a favorable report by the committee were authored by Sen. William J. Guste Jr. of New Orleans and Sen. Jules C. Mollere of Jefferson Parish. Indications are that these will be left on the Senate calendar while the administration-backed resolution is pushed through the Legislature.

Both the Guste and Mollere resolutions included non-legislators on the committees.

Downs, a former aide to

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—AP WIREPHOTO.

LISTENING LEGISLATORS — GOV. JOHN J. M'KEITHEN shakes his fist as he faces a joint session of the Louisiana Legislature in Baton Rouge yesterday. The 60-day session is now in its third day.

Mafia Probe Moves OK'd by Senate Panel

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McKeithen in his office, was named in the Life magazine article as a close link to the Mafia.

SPEAKING IN A halting voice, with tears welling up in his eyes, Downs said he welcomes the legislative investigation into the charges.

Reminding the committee that he had been through other investigations, Downs said, "Please don't drag it out, because there is just so much you can endure.

"I have nothing to fear whatsoever but I want to clear my name."

GOV. M'KEITHEN, in his talk to the legislature, noted that Life magazine still is investigating Downs and said reporters are counting the cows he has on his farm near Alexandria.

"I would like to say," Downs told the committee, "that any investigation by this legislative body . . . is, of course, welcomed by me.

"This is not the first investigation I have been involved in," he continued. He noted that his name had been linked in a newspaper story to a telephone connection between the capitol and underworld figure Carlos Marcello.

HE SAID he suffered through six months without being able or have the chance to prove his innocence and "here I am faced with another."

"When you reach my age, life becomes uncertain," Downs said as tears flowed. "You don't have much worldly goods to leave to your children. If you don't have anything but a good name which you have tried to build up over 25 years, then you want to leave that good name."

Downs said, "If it is a crime, a violation of the law, to have met or known or ever spoken to Mr. Marcello, there aren't enough jails in Louisiana to hold the people."

HE SAID HE wished Life had presented its evidence to a grand jury where he would have taken his chances.

"That's where these charges should have been made," Downs declared.

Sen. Guste charged that an investigation while the legislature is in session could not do the job that is required. Sen. Mollere claimed the public has lost confidence in the ability of elected officials to conduct an impartial probe.

"IN THE CROWDED processes of this legislature," Guste declared, "it will be utterly impossible to do the job that is necessary."

He said the committee vote could well be the most crucial on the whole issue of organized crime in this session and what the legislature does about the charges.

"I don't believe it is possible in any way, shape or form to scratch the surface on organized crime during this session of the legislature."

HE CHARGED the legislature now holds rushed meetings on legislative matters and he does not believe it is fair to the people of Louisiana to hold rushed up hearings on the organized crime issue.

Sen. Mollere said a cloud has been cast over the state "and I think this cloud must be lifted. There has been a great loss of faith in elected officials.

"I do not believe any investigation done by elected officials will convince the people of the truth of the article," he said.

HE SAID THE people want an investigation by a body of impartial persons. He proposed a 19-member committee with only four lawmakers on it.

Mollere said he believes the legislature could make an impartial probe but does not believe the public would be convinced of its validity.

"The public isn't going to believe it, coming from a majority of legislators or elected officials," Mollere said. "This bothers me more than anything else."

He said, "The people are going to feel we are covering up things."

SEN. J. D. Deblieux of Baton Rouge said the legislature has enough to do attending to its regular duties and he was concerned over whether the quick probe would be a whitewash or a persecution.

Sen. J. B. Davis of Shreveport said the people had one investigation of the Life charges made by appointed officials.

"The people of the state were not satisfied," he charged, "right or wrong. People in my area were not satisfied they made an in depth, impartial or complete probe."

THE ORIGINAL administration proposal called for a five-man committee which would end its work 15 days before the end of the session.

Sen. Nat Kiefer, New Orleans, a member of Judiciary A Committee which approved the resolutions, won adoption of amendments increasing the size to seven and giving the committee authority to determine if additional time is needed for investigation.

Keifer said that if the article's author, David Chandler of New Orleans, will appear before the committee then something may be accomplished. Otherwise, he said, the committee would have nothing on which to base its probe other than the story's charges.

SAYING HE DID not want to prejudge the validity of the charges, Kiefer nonetheless declared that he read it for first time last night and found 60 to 70 per cent of it to be wrong. He said that the reference to Churchill Farms, which is owned by Marcello, was "obviously blatantly false." The farm was mentioned in several aspects but Kiefer didn't say which he found false.

Sen. Barham, lead author of the resolution, said he felt a legislative hearing during the current session is the proper way to do the task.

"A so-called long, drawn-out investigation over several months by an investigating committee may do nothing but hurt this state and hurt many innocent people," the Ruston lawmaker said.

HE SAID THE purpose of an immediate investigation is to determine if there is enough to go all out, to determine if a prolonged investigation is required.

Sen. Duplantier, chairman of Judiciary A Committee, said the resolution was the product of his own feelings based on what the governor had said at the legislative talk.

"I can't think of anything worse we can impose on Louisiana than a long, drawn-out (investigation)," he said.

DUPLANTIER SAID he is convinced there is ample time in the present session to conduct the probe.

The New Orleans solon noted that an executive department committee had conducted a probe of the part played by state government officials and added he was not so sure that the Legislature wanted to go any further than state officials. Influence on local governments by organized crime also was alleged.

Sen. Claude Duval of Houma, author of another all-legislative committee investigation into all aspects of organized crime, drafted the